Edmonton Daily Bulletin

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A GROUP OF OLD-TIMERS

Vlll: First Banker, Sheriff and Others. Varied experiences of men who came in with Red River Carts, who knew the long days of waiting, without ever losing faith in Edmonton.

G.R.F. KIRKPATRICK

The first passenger train to leave Calgary in 1891 on the new C. & E railway had among its passengers the first banker of Edmonton, Mr. G.R.F. Kirkpatrick, a yo ng man and member of a prominent Ontario family. The advent of the railway had caused Calgary to outdistance temporarily the older town of Edmonton, and while the southern city had already a couple of banks the fur-trading post further north was as yet without modern arrangements for financial dealings. Naturally then the opening of thefirst bank in the frontier town was a matter of great consequence, and the arrival of its manager an event of moment.

Mr. Kirkpatrick was to open the first bank in the west between Calgary and the North Pole, and he set about his task with enthusiasm. He soon secured office-room for the bank in a frame building on Second Street, which is now a boarding house across the way from the more fashionable pension, Updown Villa. About this first building there was no plate glass, no polished oak or marble floors as in the stately pillared structure on Jasper Avenue, the present Imperial Bank, of which Mr. Kirkpatrick is still manager.

The site of

The site of this new building was then primitive forest; there was no busy thoroughfare like the Jasper of today, and the main trail of Frot Edmonton ran up past the Alberta Hotel and out by the river's bank. This is as it was 17 years ago. Today the massive bank building with its Grecian portico embodies in stone a record of the progress Edmonton has made together with a splendid prophecy of what the Edmonton of tomorrow will be.

Since this branch of the Imperial Bank was opened in Edmonton the development of banking business has been speedy, until now there are fourteen banking institutions in the city and some of these occupy quarters in very handsome and substantial brick structures. Seventeen years ago however Mr. Kirkpatrick was very glad to secure for the first bank the small frame building on Second Street.

The bank opened business upstairs in this house, with packing-cases for counters and otherwise quite primitive in equipments. After a few weeks the office below was in shape, and the banker and his assistant moved downstairs.

As there were only two upon the staff of the bank it frequently fell to the manager's lot to do junior's work. He would take a draft out for acceptance, and business men who saw him pass would hurry out to the street and ask him if he would take a deposit up to the bank for them.

A large part of the business transacted consisted in buying gold amalgam. Sometimes this amounted to $25,000 a year, all washed out of the Saskatchewan. The bank would

buy it and ship it off to the Mint. For every ounce of the amalgam the miners received $15 from the bank here, and notwithstanding a time-honored tradition about the honesty of miners Mr. Kirkpatrick states that they sometimes wet the gold amalgam to make it weigh more. But this was perhaps due to the fact that men who were not of the real miner's type but who found themselves here out of work used to go down to the river and wash out on an average gold worth $2.50 each day. Mr. Kirkpatrick, like several others who lived here in the mining days, feels confident that as much gold could still be found by an energetic man washing out the sand after high water in spring.

The banker had also to watch closely in those days that there was not too much quicksilver inside the amalgam. To avoid paying for quicksilver at gold rates they frequently cut open the amalgam at the bank, and if it was very bad they sent it down to Raymer the jeweller to have the quicksilver burnt out. This was an important matter, for at the Mint the bank received only 60 cents an ounce for quicksilver, and $18 to $19 for as much gold.

When the bank was first opened there were days when not one customer would enter their doors, and others when only one or two broke the monotomy. On such days there must have been a temptation for the manager to go to the upstairs window and shoot some prairie chickens, as more than once he was able to do this in the bush lying between what is now All Saint's Church and Government House.

One day the town solicitor (now Mr. Justice Beck) telephoned up that there was a note to protest. A few minutes later he came up riding on a pony which he used in transacting business in the scattered little town, where no Edmontonian needs to be told the highways were shockingly muddy at times: Edmonton mud is as adhesive as anything well can be. This day the town solicitor rode up to the bank. The clerk called out to him to come in--and in the solicitor did ride, transacting his business from the dizzy heights of his saddle-pony.

As might be expected in a frontier town there was some difficulty at first in adjusting to real old-timers' views the new financial conditions introduced by banks. As one instance there was the white-heat indignation of the late Bill Cust because he was notified that a note was overdue. His sense of honor was outraged. That anyone should doubt that he, Bill Cust, would pay a rightful debt! Preposterous! He promptly withdrew his banking-account, and only returned it to the Imperial Bank some time before his death.

When Mr. Kirkpatrick arrived here the main part of the town of Edmonton lay between the Alberta Hotel and the junction of Jasper and Grierson. He recalls that Johnstone Walker, on moving his store from Fraser Avenue to its present site, was rebuked by his friends for lack of judgment. They thought he was building too far west!

There were no sidewalks in those days, and communication between any outlying place and the town was usually

made along narrow trails through the woods such as might still be seen a year ago between Fourth and Fifth streets, south of Jasper. One night shortly after their arrival in Edmonton Mr. Kirkpatrick and his assistant were coming up from the Big House where they had spent an evening with the Hardistys, and they believed themselves on the way to the Jasper House where they boarded.

The night was dark; the trails ran in a bewildering variety and the newcomers groping their way in the darkness only confused themselves more at each turning. Their perplexity continued to grow until finally they emerged from the bush at the cemetery clearing, and from there had a long walk back to town.

Two epochs in Edmonton's history stand out vividly in the mind of Mr. Kirkpatrick, the Land Office trouble and the Klondyke rush. In the first case Mr. Kirkpatrick says Father Fouquier, walking from the Mission on Tenth Street one Saturday afternoon, came over to Mr. Kirkpatrick and told him that men were loading the books and furniture of the Land Office into a waggon preparatory to removing it. They agreed that the townspeople should all be told, and messengers were sent out.

In a remarkably short time over one hundred men had gathered to prevent the removal of the books, and Matthew McCauley and John McDougall called out the old Home Guard of Rebellion days. Mr. Beck, as town solicitor, had given his opinion that it was necessary for two justices of the peace to give such an order, and the townspeople obeyed

the suggestion, for they were determined to keep entirely within the law--unless they could not prevent the removal without breaking the law. All the leading men of the town were in the fray, Frank Oliver being one of the most active.

When it became known that the Mounted Police had been brought from Fort Saskatchewan to the bush in the north of the town, men stationed themselves, Mr. Kirkpatrick says, in the bush along the trail ready to shoot down the horses if the Police came in to town. In going to the Land Office the Police would have to pass the bank, so Mr. Kirkpatrick and his assistant were to watch for them, and immediately bring word of their arrival to the school, where the bell would be sounded and the town alarmed again.

As is well known, Edmonton's residents won out in the contest, and matters settled down into the usual routine. During the Klondyke rush the bank did a large business for the first time since its establishment. The newcomers, outfitting for their long voyage, not only spent their money lavishly at local stores, but they deposited considerable sums with the bank. Some of the merchants of Edmonton did not realize as much out of this rush as they anticipated at first, for when it fizzled out within a year they found themselves with large and rather useless supplies of evaporated potatoes, tinned bacon, condensed eggs and other useful commodities for the long overland trip, but of little value in the eyes of Edmonton housekeepers.

Quite apart from financial considerations this rush was a benefit to the residents of Edmonton. It made a lively break in the tame round of life, and its individual members breaking-in bronchos and planning narvelous means of transportation afforded the westerners real amusement. One party had a wagon with barrels for wheels or rollers, and the barrels were crammed with provisions. Another had an engine like a traction-engine with one big cog wheel in centre, and four or five box cars of provisions attached to it. A crowd gathered to see it start, but it never did.

Still another device built here near the power-house was a boat on wheels. In winter it was to be hauled along the ice of the rivers; in summer they hoped to row it. It is almost needless to state that none of the devices were feasible, and there were many wiser but disappointed men in Edmonton after the Klondyke rush.